

# IHP newsletter 837: FfD4 in Seville (AI summary)

4 July 2025

## Introduction

This issue of the weekly International Health Policies (IHP) newsletter, an initiative of the Health Policy unit at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium, reports on the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) held in Seville from 30 June to 3 July 2025. The conference coincided with the Global Tipping Points conference in Exeter, UK, which focused on Earth System risks. Despite the challenging planetary times and a widespread "heat dome" across Europe, the newsletter seeks a "silver lining" by also exploring "Positive Tipping Points". Kristof Decoster, who compiled the newsletter, even muses that the Institute of Tropical Medicine's name might become "trendy" due to the heat.

The newsletter provides extensive coverage and analysis of FfD4, highlighting several key buzzwords gaining traction: "blended finance," "de-risking," "investment partnerships," "coalitions of the willing," "purpose-driven multilateralism," "Global Public Investment," "fossil fuel phase-out" (or "defossilization"), "solidarity levies" (such as taxes on premium air tickets and private jet travel), "country platforms," the "new normal," and the ominous "global survival". FfD4 also featured the launch of the WHO's "3 by 35" Initiative on health taxes. The newsletter also touches on the G7's decision to exempt the US from a 15% minimum corporate tax rate, the closure of USAID, which was critiqued by figures like Bono Vox, Obama, and Bush Jr., and the release of the WHO Commission on Social Connection's report, revealing the sobering statistic that **"Every hour, 100 people die of loneliness-related causes"**.

## Two featured articles

- **Nicola Deghaye's piece, "Compromiso de Sevilla: Commitment or Compromise?"**, delves into the FfD4 outcome document. She clarifies that "Compromiso" translates to **"commitment" rather than "compromise"**, noting the international community's agreement to incremental changes to the global financial architecture. The article emphasises **domestic resource mobilisation** for SDGs, particularly for global health, given declining Official Development Assistance (ODA). While blended finance is promising for renewable energy and infrastructure, it is less suited for public health systems which offer long-term societal returns rather than direct private investor revenue streams. Deghaye also highlights new Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) rules allowing developing countries to use up to half their reserves for development, advocating for health ministries to claim these funds. She stresses the need for changes in global tax architecture, including taxing high net worth individuals and multinational corporations, pushing for the UN Convention on International Tax Cooperation and the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies and tax concessions. A key takeaway was the expert panel discussion at FfD4, including Joseph Stiglitz's views on new debt processes.
- The second featured article, **"Bhutan's approach to building a happy, healthy, and sustainable nation" by Soe Yu Naing**, showcases Bhutan's unique and principled approach to global health challenges. Bhutan is the only country in the world that uses **Gross National Happiness (GNH)** as a development metric alongside GDP, focusing on a balance between material progress and holistic well-being. The country has proactively addressed commercial determinants of health, lacking fast-food chains and banning tobacco sales with high import taxes. In terms of One Health and Planetary Health, Bhutan achieved 100% sterilisation of its free-roaming dog population within two years and effectively combats antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through strict regulation of antimicrobials in food production. Notably, Bhutan is the **world's only carbon-negative nation**, with over 70% forest cover and a constitutional mandate to maintain at least 60%. The country is also developing Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) with "zero" goals for plastic, malaria, rabies, drug use, and crime. Despite these achievements, Bhutan faces challenges such as emigration and brain drain among young professionals and a need for human and technical resources.

## Highlights of the Week

### FfD4 in Seville (30 June -3 July)

- **Devex – Defining a decade: What to expect from Financing for Development**  
<https://www.devex.com/news/defining-a-decade-what-to-expect-from-financing-for-development-110349> This primer published ahead of FfD4 highlights that a hard-won agreement sets the stage for implementation of promises related to debt, climate, taxes, and MDB reform, with the launch of the Sevilla Platform for Action.
- **UN News - It's time to finance our future and 'change course', Guterres tells world leaders in Sevilla**  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1165091> UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged world leaders to seize a "once-in-a-decade opportunity" to close a \$4 trillion financing gap for developing countries to meet sustainable development goals, outlining three key action areas: getting resources flowing domestically, fixing the global debt system, and reforming the global financial architecture.
- **Devex - Sevilla reporter's notebook Day 1: FfD4 kicks off** <https://www.devex.com/news/sevilla-reporter-s-notebook-day-1-ffd4-kicks-off-110383> This report covers the commencement of high-stakes talks on development finance in Sevilla, noting the presence of rising tensions among delegates.
- **Devex - Sevilla reporter's notebook Day 2: Compromiso adopted, but what next?**  
<https://www.devex.com/news/sevilla-reporter-s-notebook-day-2-compromiso-adopted-but-what-next-110394> This report details that FfD4 leaders adopted the pre-written Compromiso de Sevilla and launched a new global tax coalition, while debating public and private sector collaboration.
- **Devex Invested: Global development's Sevilla fever dream** Vince Chadwick  
<https://www.devex.com/news/devex-invested-global-development-s-sevilla-fever-dream-110064> This article offers an early look at observations from FfD4, including the question of private sector presence.
- **Devex - Sevilla reporter's notebook Day 3: Hitting a stride or hitting a wall?**  
<https://www.devex.com/news/sevilla-reporter-s-notebook-day-3-hitting-a-stride-or-hitting-a-wall-110424> This report notes that debt became the defining topic at FfD4, with some progress on a borrowers' club and pause clauses, though civil society felt access and overall progress fell short.
- **WHO launches bold push to raise health taxes and save millions of lives**  
<https://www.who.int/news/item/02-07-2025-who-launches-bold-push-to-raise-health-taxes-and-save-millions-of-lives> The "3 by 35" Initiative, launched at FfD4, urges countries to raise prices on tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks by at least 50% by 2035 to curb chronic diseases and generate US\$1 trillion for health and development funding.

### FfD4 – More reports, initiatives, analyses, advocacy, ....

- **Devex - How Spain delivered consensus at FfD4 as multilateralism feels the strain**  
<https://www.devex.com/news/how-spain-delivered-consensus-at-ffd4-as-multilateralism-feels-the-strain-110400> This piece interviews Spain's Ambassador-at-Large for Financing for Development, Mónica Colomer, on how Spain achieved consensus at FfD4 despite multilateralism feeling the strain, highlighting a shift from aid to investment partnerships.
- **UN News – New UN report charts path out of debt crisis threatening global development**  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1165051> This report, launched by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, outlines 11 technically feasible and politically viable actions to unlock sustainable financing and address the accelerating debt crisis where billions live in countries spending more on interest than health or education.
- **UN News - Drowning in debt: New forum in Sevilla offers borrowers chance to rebalance the books**  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165196> The Borrowers' Forum was launched at FfD4 as a new mechanism for debt-distressed countries to coordinate action and strengthen their voice in the global financial system.

- **Devex – How Africa’s schools and hospitals are paying the price of IMF austerity**  
<https://www.devex.com/news/how-africa-s-schools-and-hospitals-are-paying-the-price-of-imf-austerity-110296> This report, based on ActionAid findings, critiques IMF policies that compel six African governments to cut spending on vital public services like schools and hospitals in favor of servicing foreign debt, despite the IMF's stated intention to stabilize economies.
  - **Devex - Opinion: Enlightened self-interest demands global health investments** M A Pate  
<https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-enlightened-self-interest-demands-global-health-investments-110363> This opinion piece argues that investing in health sector development is not just a moral imperative but also smart policy, listing four reasons why sustained and smarter investment in health is crucial for evolving health and economic needs.
  - **Global Solidarity Levies Taskforce - Eight countries launch solidarity coalition for levies on premium flyers** <https://solidaritylevies.org/eight-countries-launch-solidarity-coalition-for-levies-on-premium-flyers/> France, Kenya, Barbados, Spain, Somalia, Benin, Sierra Leone, and Antigua & Barbuda launched a new aviation solidarity coalition at FfD4, supported by the European Commission, to work towards a better contribution from the aviation sector (especially premium flyers) to fair transitions and resilience by COP30.
  - **UN News - Spain and Brazil push global action to tax the super-rich and curb inequality**  
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165146> Spain and Brazil are spearheading an initiative to tax the super-rich globally, prioritising information sharing between governments and tax authorities to combat evasion and even considering a global wealth registry.
  - **(UCL) Working paper - Mind the Mission, Not the Gap - Rethinking blended finance for public purpose** M Mazzucato et al. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/publications/2025/jun/mind-mission-not-gap-rethinking-blended-finance-public-purpose> This paper challenges core assumptions about blended finance, arguing for a strategic reframing of it as a targeted tool within a broader mission-oriented approach to development finance, focusing on structural transformation and public value generation rather than just filling financial gaps.
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## Global Health Governance & Financing

- **WHO Chief Names New Team of Directors** The WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced a new team of 36 directors, with nine appointments remaining "acting," including key positions in Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, and a newly combined Department of Climate, Environment, Health; One Health; Urban Health; and Migration. This reorganisation follows a **budget crisis triggered by the United States' withdrawal**.
- **Navigating the Tipping Point: Four Futures for Global Development Cooperation** A new policy brief argues that the foundations of international aid and development are being shaken by geopolitical shifts, contested norms, and institutional upheaval, reaching a "tipping point". It outlines **four plausible futures for global development cooperation**: Global Solidarity 2.0, Strategic Multilateralism, Pluralist Development Cooperation, and Aid Retrenchment and Nationalist Conditionality.
- **Spain and Luxembourg Make Increased Pledges Toward the Global Fund’s Eighth Replenishment** Spain pledged **€145 million** and Luxembourg **€13.8 million** to the Global Fund’s Eighth Replenishment at FfD4, both marking increases over their previous commitments.
- **The urgency of coherence: between global ambition and local vulnerability** A Global Fund Observer issue highlights the **widening gap between high-level global health commitments and the fragile realities faced by community-led responses** on the ground. It flags that **Gavi’s Global Health Summit secured \$9 billion** for vaccines and innovation, with a pronounced emphasis on bolstering vaccine manufacturing capacity within Africa, notably through the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator (AVMA). Concerns are raised about funding delays and the marginalisation of civil society in rapid reprioritisation processes. African civil society organisations are calling for full involvement in planning for future pandemics after the global approval of the Pandemic Agreement. African leaders at the 78th World Health Assembly charted a new course for health financing, focusing on **transitioning from donor reliance to self-sustaining health systems**.

- **A New Compact for Health Financing: Donor Priority Setting** Amid dramatic cuts to global health financing, a proposal suggests that donors should move beyond priority-setting by diseases and interventions to instead focus on **"common goods" and "country partnerships"**.
- **The EU's Ambition to Tie Its Development Aid Will Undermine Economic Development** Reports indicate the EU is preparing to **tie its development spending more directly to its own domestic priorities**, potentially making financing conditional on measures such as curbing migration or favouring European industry. This approach is likened to a "Trumpian, 'America-first'" foreign policy and risks undermining development goals, as **tied aid is ineffective and undermines long-term development**.
- **Gavi's Sania Nishtar is 'very hopeful' US will return as a donor** Despite falling short of its fundraising goal at its replenishment event, Gavi's chief executive officer Sania Nishtar remains hopeful that the US will return as a donor.

## Trump 2.0

- **Bush, Obama — and singer Bono — fault Trump's gutting of USAID** Former Presidents Obama and Bush Jr., along with singer Bono, criticised President Trump's effective dissolution of USAID on the agency's last day, with Obama calling it a "travesty" and "tragedy".
- **Evaluating the impact of two decades of USAID interventions and projecting the effects of defunding** A Lancet study aimed to evaluate USAID's impact and forecast the effects of its defunding. The analysis found that USAID-funded programs prevented nearly 92 million deaths across 133 countries from 2001 through 2021. However, it projected that the **83% funding cuts could lead to over 14 million additional deaths by 2030**, including 4.5 million among children under five. This forecast has been criticised for reinforcing "American-centrism" and not acknowledging Africa's resilience without USAID.
- **USAID Shut Down** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the official end of USAID, stating its "charity-based" model was against American interests and spawned "a globe-spanning NGO industrial complex at taxpayer expense". The new model will provide "targeted and limited" aid, favouring nations demonstrating a willingness to help themselves and welcoming US investment, replacing diverse aid logos with the American flag.
- **I Worked at U.S.A.I.D. for Over 8 Years. This Is Our Biggest Failure.** A guest essay by a former USAID employee argues that the agency's greatest failure was its inability to communicate its impact to the American public, focusing instead on Congress and other government insiders. The author warns that if global aid is ever rebuilt, it cannot be on this "broken foundation" that treated public awareness as optional.
- **State Dept takeover of USAID is an 'impending trainwreck,' experts say** Veteran development leaders described the State Department's absorption of USAID's remnants as a major step backward for US global development efforts, posing significant risk. Concerns include the State Department having only 718 people (less than 6% of USAID's workforce) to manage programs, which will drastically increase the per capita management responsibility per officer.
- **Senate passes Trump's tax-cut bill that would slash Medicaid spending** The Senate passed President Trump's tax-cut bill, which includes provisions to **slash Medicaid spending**. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projected that **11.8 million people would lose health insurance** under the Senate Republican tax bill.
- **MAHA Says Its Focus Is Chronic Diseases – Kennedy and Trump Actions Show Otherwise** An analysis critiques the "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA) commission report, led by Robert F. Kennedy Jr., on childhood chronic disease. The report was found to be riddled with factual inaccuracies, mischaracterisations of research, and citations of non-existent studies. Notably, the report **omits several leading causes of preventable chronic disease deaths** in the United States, including tobacco, alcohol, drug overdoses, and air pollution, despite claiming to tackle the "epidemic" of chronic diseases.
- **Even at 1 Percent, the US Remittance Tax Hits Poor Countries Hard** President Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill" includes a **1% tax on remittances**, which is projected to have a significant impact on low- and middle-income countries, potentially outweighing the impact of aid cuts.

## PPPR (Pandemic Preparedness, Prevention, and Response)

- **As the US steps out, the rest of the world steps up on global health security** Discussions are set to resume in Geneva on the Pandemic Agreement, advancing work to draft an annex on Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS).

#### Covid origins

- **Animal Source Most Likely Origin of SARS-COV2, but Findings Inconclusive, says WHO Expert Group** A four-year WHO-sponsored investigation concluded that **most scientific data supports the hypothesis that SARS-CoV-2 originated from an animal spillover** (either directly from bats or via intermediate hosts). However, the possibility that the **virus escaped from a lab leak remains on the table**. The investigation was hampered by large gaps in data provided by China and a lack of access to key intelligence reports from the United States and Germany.

#### Mpox

- **Health officials encouraged by recent trends in Africa's mpox outbreaks** African health officials are observing an encouraging decline in some of the region's mpox hot spots, including Sierra Leone. Despite this, the region remains significantly short of its mpox vaccine goal, needing 6.4 million doses over six months.
- **Mpox epidemic is straining African health systems after US aid cuts** More than a dozen African nations are struggling to contain the mpox outbreak as their health systems contend with the loss of international support. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which has been hardest hit, a WHO analysis suggests that a "scattershot" approach to vaccination with limited doses has had little impact despite over 700,000 people vaccinated.

#### Run-up to UN HL meeting on NCDs (in September)

- **Political leadership key to advancing the non-communicable disease response** The NCD Alliance civil society network has outlined its campaign priorities for the upcoming fourth High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), focusing on **five calls: accelerating implementation, mobilising investment, breaking down silos, engaging communities, and delivering accountability**.
- **UN's NCD Declaration Overlooks a Preventable Killer: Air Pollution** Concerns have been raised that the draft political declaration for the UN HLM on NCDs and Mental Health **barely acknowledges air pollution**. The NCD Alliance also voices strong concerns over the **absence of any mention of fossil fuels**, which are identified as the leading driver of air pollution, stressing that reducing fossil fuel use and ensuring a just transition to clean energy must be central to NCD prevention efforts.
- **Metrics for diplomats: is mortality from non-communicable diseases increasing or decreasing?** An analysis clarifies the importance of distinguishing between age-standardised mortality rates (ASMRs) and the total number of deaths when assessing NCD trends. Globally, ASMRs for cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases declined between 1990 and 2021, though an increase was observed for diabetes.

#### UHC & PHC (Universal Health Coverage & Primary Health Care)

- **Strengthening primary health-care leadership Effective whole-system leadership is urgently needed to advance primary health care (PHC)** as the foundational approach for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). WHO's PHC Leadership Course received over 2700 applications from 155 countries, equipping leaders with both technical knowledge and implementation skills.
- **Nigeria seeks deeper health ties with Brazil, unveils bold agenda for Universal Health Coverage** Nigeria has affirmed its commitment to UHC by deepening strategic health sector cooperation with Brazil, focusing on local pharmaceutical production, digital health, and workforce development, drawing lessons from Brazil's successful health system model.

#### WASH in health systems (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene)

- **No hygiene, no health: Fixing the foundations of care** A World Bank blog highlights that **globally, half of all healthcare facilities lack basic hygiene services**, affecting over 850 million people and increasing risks for patients and health workers. WASH facilities are fundamental for effective infection prevention and control. A new approach is being implemented, with the World Bank supporting countries to invest in safe, resilient, and sustainable health systems, powered by improved electricity access.

#### Access to Medicines, vaccines & other health technologies

- **Did a study really show a ten-fold increase in deaths among girls immunized with diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) vaccine?** An article discusses how Robert F. Kennedy Jr. continues to fuel the global anti-vaccine movement. The BMJ notes that he and others in the antivaccine movement are using the power of the US government to promote disinformation and flawed science.
- **MSF calls for vaccine access for children in humanitarian settings** Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urges that despite any funding shortfall from Gavi's replenishment summit, Gavi and donors must ensure stronger efforts to reach children in humanitarian settings with immunisation.

#### Conflict & health

- **Rising poverty in conflict zones 'causes a billion people to go hungry'** The World Bank reports that **extreme poverty is accelerating in 39 countries affected by war and conflict**, leading to over a billion people going hungry. More than 70% of people suffering from conflict and instability are Africans, with half of these countries experiencing chronic instability for 15 years or more.
- **First independent survey of deaths in Gaza reports more than 80,000 fatalities** A survey reports over 80,000 fatalities in Gaza, aligning with other efforts to count the number of people killed amid the ongoing conflict.
- **GAZA: Starvation or gunfire — not a humanitarian response** Oxfam and over 170 other NGOs operating in Gaza have called for immediate action to end what they describe as a deadly Israeli aid distribution scheme, urging a return to existing UN-led coordination mechanisms and the lifting of the Israeli government's blockade on aid and commercial supplies.

#### Planetary Health

- **UN expert urges criminalizing fossil fuel disinformation, banning lobbying** A UN special rapporteur is calling for **criminal penalties against those spreading disinformation about the climate crisis** and a **total ban on fossil fuel industry lobbying and advertising**. The report argues that wealthy fossil fuel nations are legally obliged to **fully phase out oil, gas, and coal by 2030** and compensate communities for harms caused. It also advocates for the **"defossilization" of entire economies** – eradicating fossil fuels from all sectors, as merely transitioning to clean energy is insufficient.
- **Plastics in health care: rethinking medical device innovation, use, and disposal for sustainability** The article highlights that approximately **16 billion plastic syringes and 15 billion face masks are discarded annually**, pointing to the "dark side" of single-use medical plastics and the urgent need to rethink their disposal for sustainability.
- **Droughts worldwide pushing tens of millions towards starvation** A report indicates that droughts and water mismanagement are causing shortages globally, impacting food supplies, energy, and public health. Over 90 million people in eastern and southern Africa are facing extreme hunger due to record-breaking drought. The executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification states that "drought is no longer a distant threat. It is here, escalating, and demands urgent global cooperation".
- **WHO and Its Chinese and European Partners Jointly Launch Multilateral Climate-Health Initiative** The WHO, in collaboration with cities and research institutions from China and Europe, launched the **Geneva 1.5°C Proactive Health Initiative**, which is described as the world's first transnational academic-industry-government platform focused on climate-health governance in urban contexts.

#### WHO Commission on Social Connection

- **From loneliness to social connection: charting a path to healthier societies** A landmark report from the WHO Commission on Social Connection highlights that **social isolation and loneliness are widespread** and have serious, yet under-recognised, impacts on health, well-being, and society. The report reveals that **1 in 6 people worldwide is affected by loneliness**, which is linked to an estimated **100 deaths every hour** (over 871,000 annually). Loneliness affects people of all ages, particularly youth and those in low- and middle-income countries, where rates are twice as high as in high-income countries. The report outlines a roadmap for global action focusing on policy, research, interventions, improved measurement (including developing a global Social Connection Index), and public engagement.

#### Miscellaneous

- **Leadership change at African journal sparks calls for bold reform** The Journal of Public Health in Africa (JPHIA) is facing calls for significant reforms to better serve the scientific community and amplify African voices in global health research.
  - **The fragility of public health in the face of controversial leadership** A commentary highlights that evidence-based leadership is crucial for maintaining public trust and health system integrity, warning against policies influenced by "conspiracy rhetoric".
-